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Fire Danger Very High

Lush spring growth plus hot summer days equals very high fire danger.

Over the last couple of weeks, land management agencies and local fire departments have responded to an increasing number of wildland fires, both lightning and human-caused. While we can't keep lightning from striking, we can take steps to prevent human-caused blazes.

To that end, Stage 1 Fire restrictions are now in place on private, state and Bureau of Land Management lands in Big Horn, Carbon, Musselshell, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, and Yellowstone counties.

Under Stage 1, fires are prohibited except within developed recreation sites, and smoking is allowed only in areas cleared of flammable materials. Exemptions include fires fueled solely by liquid petroleum or LPG, or other activities for which there is a permit or written authorization.

An exemption does not absolve an individual or organization from liability or responsibility for any fire started by the exempted activity.

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Even in areas not under fire restrictions, a permit is required for any open burning other than campfires. Additional restrictions may also exist in certain areas. **Before burning such things as slash piles, ditches, or fields, please contact your local fire department or sheriff's office for more information and to obtain any necessary permits.**

Even the smallest spark has the potential to cause significant damage, so always crush smokes dead out; never leave a campfire unattended; ensure that your vehicle has a properly installed spark arrester that is operational; stop and park only in areas clear of vegetation; and observe all fire restrictions. Take precautions, but always be prepared: carry a shovel, bucket and fire extinguisher. Also remember that cross country travel is not allowed on most federal and state lands.

As summer continues, additional restrictions may be put in place to help protect public safety and preserve personal property and natural resources. In the seven-county area surrounding Billings, such restrictions are coordinated through the Billings Area Restrictions Group, which includes representatives from federal, state and local agencies. The group works to ensure that any fire restrictions placed in the area are not only warranted, but that they are also consistent and easy to understand.

For more information about fire restrictions and prevention, or for tips on how to create defensible space around your home, contact Lisa Osborn, Fire Prevention Specialist, at (406) 657-6200, ext. 224, or your county fire warden.
